

**North Sea Fisheries Conference, London, December 2-6, 1963**

On 30 April, the British government, embroiled in disputes with several countries over fishing rights, announced its intention to withdraw from the 81 year old convention establishing a three mile limit on North Sea fishing. The government at the same time announced it was inviting members of the European Free Trade Area (EFTA), the Common Market countries, Iceland, Ireland and Spain to a conference in late fall to discuss this problem.

The British fishing industry has been bringing pressure to bear on the government to extend its fishing limits because of a growing number of foreign fishing operations off the coast of the UK. These foreign fleets have included large numbers of Soviet, Polish and East German vessels. Specific proposals have been advanced by British fishing interests to close the Minch, the Moray Firth, and the Clyde estuary in Scotland. East Coast fishing interests have also demanded a six mile headland to headland limit.

In 1960, the Law of the Sea Conference failed to approve a UK supported proposal for a six mile territorial sea, with an adjacent six mile fishing zone in which traditional fishing rights granted to foreign nations could be terminated after ten years. Countries that would be mainly affected by an extension of British fishery limits would be France, Belgium, Germany, Poland and Russia.

On the eve of the Fisheries Conference the influential London Times, often considered a spokesman for government views, said that the government would announce an extension of its waters barred to foreign fishermen to 12 miles when the (International Fisheries) Conference began on 2 December.

Later, the Foreign Office denied the report although government spokesman unofficially made it clear that if after making compromise proposals, no concessions were forthcoming, the British delegation would make clear to the conference their intention to extend fishing limits to 12 miles. If some concessions were forthcoming the extension could be reduced to eight or six miles.

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The main difficulty over such an agreement lies in the clash of interest between those countries which want access to fishing grounds--France and Belgium are examples --and those which want access to markets--among which are Britain and the Scandinavian countries. There are reliable reports that compromise proposals will be proposed under which Britain would agree not to extend its fishing limits --at least not as far as 12 miles--if adequate access to Common Market and other countries for fresh fish exports, and in particular for deep frozen fish were granted in return.

Government spokesmen have been quick to distinguish between Territorial limits and Fishing limits. In Parliament on 30 April Lord Privy Seal, Edward Heath, made it clear that the government is not thinking of extending territorial limits to 12 miles. Such action would mean British and French control over the Channel, an undesirable precedent and not something they would do bilaterally without wider agreement. The implication in Heath's statement is that failing agreement Britain will take unilateral action--probably in keeping with the six mile limit for territorial waters and 12 miles for fishery jurisdiction that was adopted by many maritime countries.

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